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# THOMAS SLOO, JR.

## A TYPICAL POLITICIAN OF EARLY ILLINOIS.

Address before the  
Illinois State Historical Society  
At Its Twelfth Annual Meeting,  
May, 1911.

By  
ISAAC J. COX,  
University of Cincinnati.

Reprinted from the Transactions of the Society  
for the year 1911.

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## THOMAS SLOO, JR., A TYPICAL POLITICIAN OF EARLY ILLINOIS.

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Isaac Joslin Cox, University of Cincinnati.

In a former volume of the publications of this Society Dr. John F. Snyder has given a brief sketch of the career of Thomas Sloo, Jr. under the caption, "Forgotten Statesmen of Illinois."<sup>1</sup> The only reason for adding to this sketch is the fact that it has been my personal pleasure to find in the Torrence Collection<sup>2</sup> of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio a considerable number of hitherto unused letters concerning Mr. Sloo and his early life in Ohio and Illinois. These have been edited and will appear in current numbers of the quarterly issued by that society. The present sketch is an attempt to present from these letters certain facts of the career of Sloo that bear upon the politics of early Illinois.

While it may seem strange that this material relating to Mr. Sloo should be found in an Ohio depository, that fact is but another illustration of the interlacing of the history of the whole Mississippi Valley. In the westward movement of our population we are familiar with the fact that the outlying communities of one generation act as the nurseries for more remote communities to be established at later periods. In this respect certain districts of the upper Ohio Valley, more particularly the Blue Grass Region, Marietta, and the Miami districts were centers from which the outskirts of the Northwest Territory and the lower Mississippi Valley were later peopled. Mr. Sloo who was born at Washington, Mason County, Kentucky, and who passed his youth and young manhood in Cincinnati and about a decade of his more mature years in Illinois, before going on to New Orleans where he spent the greater part of his life, is a typical illustration of this fact. His parents crossed the moun-

<sup>1</sup> Publication No. 8 of the Illinois State Historical Library, containing *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the year 1903*, pp. 190-210. The sketch of Sloo is found on pp. 201-206.

<sup>2</sup> This collection comprises letters written by and to William Henry Harrison, James Findlay, Thomas Sloo, Jr., George Paull Torrence, and others of local celebrity in Cincinnati and vicinity, as well as a few from men of national reputation. Seven numbers scattered through Volume I.-VI. of the *Quarterly* issued by the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, contain selections from the letters of the Torrence Collection. In addition to the letters the collection comprises the account books of the firm of Smith and Findlay, pioneer merchants of Cincinnati, military records of the early Indian campaigns, Findlay's accounts as receiver of public monies at Cincinnati, Hamilton County records acquired by Torrence, and miscellaneous printed and written documents, broadsides, public acts, etc., etc., such as would usually be collected in the course of the long business and political experience of record preserving pioneers. The bulk of the letters in the collection is addressed to Findlay. Those addressed to Torrence follow in numbers, while there are a fairly large group addressed to Thomas Sloo, Jr., and a few written by him. The presence of the letters addressed to Sloo may be accounted for by the fact that Torrence was his brother-in-law, to whom Sloo seems to have sent many of his papers, when he moved to New Orleans, about 1830.

tains when the upper Ohio Valley was still a wilderness and began a pioneer existence in Kentucky just as that commonwealth became a state in the American Union. Mr. Sloo himself belonged to the first generation of native Trans-Allegheny pioneers and came to Illinois shortly after statehood was bestowed upon it. He figured in the stirring politics of the period when party lines were cast upon a personal basis, achieved an honorable position among the leaders of the new State, narrowly missed attaining the office of its chief executive, and left his impress upon its economic conditions. He then passed on to a distant but still connected scene of action where his career was cast in more retired personal and business lines with, however, an honorable opportunity for leaving his impress upon the community at large.

Mr. Sloo seems to have taken up his residence in Illinois during the spring of 1820, when he was in his thirtieth year. Although a comparatively young man his previous career had been an honorable one in his adopted home in Cincinnati. One of the first references to him in the Torrence papers bears the date of Dec. 4, 1811, and this letter is addressed to him as an inmate of General James Findlay's household.<sup>1</sup> Although barely of age he seems to have been the confidential secretary of Findlay who was not only one of the leading merchants of Cincinnati but also Receiver of Public Monies for the Land Office and a high officer in the state militia. The relationship that young Sloo bore to him is indicated by the fact that Findlay refers to him as his "friend and sheet anchor."<sup>2</sup> Findlay left his affairs in Sloo's hands while he was absent on public business connected with the preparation for the War of 1812, and in fact the General and his wife seemed to have adopted him into their childless but "friendly family" as they were later by marriage to admit him into closer relationship.

Despite the trust reposed in young Sloo he evidently chafed at a condition of affairs which kept him in Cincinnati while military measures were under way in northern Ohio, as a letter to his benefactress states.<sup>3</sup> "What sensations must be produced in every bosom, that possesses the spark of patriotism or thirst for glory in the field of Mars. But fate as usual smiles on me but with contempt. She appears to decree in dire opposition to fire of youth and feelings of independency—All's Well." In the second year of the war Sloo was sent to the east on important business for the Miami Exporting Company in connection with transportation of provisions and specie for the western army.<sup>4</sup> While absent at the seat of government he was offered a commission in the regiment of Light Artillery.<sup>5</sup> A more important result of this trip seems to be indicated in an enthusiastic description of his visit at Mercersburg, Pa. The sequel to this visit is his marriage, July 14, 1814, to Miss Harriet Irwin, a native of that town and a niece of Mrs. Findlay.<sup>6</sup> At the conclusion of the war with Great Britain certain of the leading merchants

<sup>1</sup> P. T. Schenck to Thomas Sloo, Jr., Dec. 4, 1811. *Torrence Papers*, Box 20, No. 29.

<sup>2</sup> James Findlay to Mrs. Jane Findlay, *Torrence Papers*, Box 6, No. 48. Other letters of this same date show Sloo's confidential relations with Findlay.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Box 21, No. 36.

<sup>4</sup> A few meagre details of this mission are given in letters of Martin Baum (*Torrence Papers*, Box 2, Nos. 8, 9, 10), of John Armstrong (*Ibid.* Box 1, No. 14a), of James Taylor (*Ibid.* Box 26, No. 18), and of Sloo, himself (*Ibid.* Box 21, No. 37, Box 1, No. 14b.).

<sup>5</sup> Sloo evidently did not accept this commission in regular army.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Snyder, *loc. cit.* p. 202.

of Cincinnati united to form a company to introduce English goods directly into that city by the way of New Orleans. Mr. Sloo, now of the firm of Baum and Sloo, and who had recently lost his bride after less than a year's marriage, was selected to act as the purchasing agent of this company in England and spent the next two years in this important commission. His own course seems to have been marked by great discretion, although the company did not realize their full expectations from the project because of unfortunate trading and banking conditions prevailing throughout the country.<sup>1</sup>

Returning to Cincinnati Sloo became a merchant in that city and also received certain other honors. 1818 he became one of the directors of the Cincinnati branch of the Second United States Bank, a position which brought him into close friendship with the cashier of that institution, Gorham A. Worth, from whose letters we gain many of the facts of Sloo's history for the next ten years.<sup>2</sup> The year 1819, however, was marked by great financial disaster for nearly every leading citizen of Cincinnati. By 1820 the branch of the Second United States Bank, familiarly known in the west as the "Monster," had foreclosed mortgages upon about half of the property in the business district of Cincinnati. This result was brought about by the intensive speculative spirit of the people of that city which permitted loose methods in conducting the affairs of the bank, as well as by the drastic measures assumed by that institution.<sup>3</sup> The correspondence of Worth with Sloo at this period throws many an interesting sidelight upon the general financial conditions of Cincinnati and of the middle west. For those directly involved, including Sloo, the situation was one of despair.<sup>4</sup>

In the latter part of 1819 Sloo was appointed as agent of the Quartermaster General's Department for Cincinnati, Newport, and vicinity.<sup>5</sup> Somewhat earlier in this year he married his second wife, Miss Rebecca Smith Findlay, a niece this time of General James Findlay.<sup>6</sup> Thus he was doubly connected by marriage with those who had been his early benefactors.

The failure of his commercial ventures in Cincinnati caused losses which he honorably liquidated in time, although he was long hampered by them.<sup>7</sup> His obligations determined Sloo to seek a new career elsewhere. For some years his father had been connected with the United

<sup>1</sup> See letters which Sloo bore introducing him to General Jonathan Dayton (*Torrence Papers*, Box 14, No. 58) and General Aaron Ogden (*Ibid.*, Box 22, No. 3), and also instructions written to him while abroad (*Ibid.*, Box 11, Nos. 73, 74). One interesting item is a request from General Pike's widow (*Ibid.*, Box 18, No. 71, printed in the *Quarterly of the Historical and Philosophical Society*, Vol. IV, p. 135) requesting him to collect the royalty due from the English edition of her husband's book.

<sup>2</sup> These letters are contained in the *Torrence Papers*, Box 29, Nos. 49-66, and cover the years 1818-1824 inclusive. They are published, along with others relating to Sloo in Volume VI. of the *Quarterly of the Historical and Philosophical Society*. In acknowledging a letter of Sloo Worth writes "It was a fine long letter in your usual easy and pleasant style."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, and Catterall, Ralph, C. H., *The Second Bank of the United States, passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Worth's letter of Aug. 2, 1820, just a few weeks before the Branch of the United States Bank at Cincinnati was closed, is of special interest. *Torrence Papers*, Box 29, No. 58.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Box 13, No. 18. This was probably the result of Sloo's friendship with Thomas Jesup, then Quartermaster-General of the United States Army.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Snyder, *loc cit.* p. 202. She was the daughter of John Findlay of Chambersburg, who was at one time Congressman from his district, and later postmaster of his town under Jackson. Cf. *Torrence Papers, passim* and the volumes of the *Quarterly of the Historical and Philosophical Society* of Ohio.

<sup>7</sup> This is shown by references in the *Torrence Papers* as late as 1828.

States Land Offices at Kaskaskia and Shawneetown, Ill.<sup>1</sup> He, himself, as well as his friends, Worth and Torrence, had speculated heavily in western lands in Illinois and in Missouri.<sup>2</sup> With his father and brothers living in Illinois and with land claims located near Shawneetown and along the lower Ohio, where H. L. Webb and Dr. William Alexander were attempting to develop a metropolis, it was only natural that Sloo should seek to recuperate his fortune in the young but thriving State. The process of financial recuperation, however, seems to have been a very slow one and Worth's letters show that he, at least, had little confidence in the ultimate success of Webb and Alexander's projects, or in the character of the men themselves.<sup>3</sup>

With the handicap of business failure in Cincinnati Sloo also brought to the new State the prestige of friendship and intimate relation with such important men as Findlay, George P. Torrence, his brother-in-law, Jacob Burnet, and General William Henry Harrison. Through some of these men and his own family connections, he was likewise a protégé of W. H. Crawford, then Secretary of the Treasury and an aspirant for the Presidency. Sloo was thus naturally thrown in with another leading Crawfordite, Edward Coles, although he seems to have had intimate friends in the party that usually opposed the latter. His friendship for Crawford won for him later the enmity of Ninian Edwards, Daniel P. Cook, and others who were recognized as active Calhoun men. Despite this his prospects for political prominence seemed brighter than his financial ones.

Mr. Sloo seems to have tarried for a time at Shawneetown, where his father was already located, and then in 1821 passed further westward to locate in the new county of Hamilton, of which he was the first surveyor. In this capacity he laid out the town of McLeansboro, its county seat, which became his residence. In the combined capacity of merchant and farmer he speedily became a well known figure in that portion of the State and deservedly popular.<sup>4</sup> It was characteristic for the new comer to plunge into politics and Sloo had hardly settled in his new environs before he received an appeal to take sides in the gubernatorial contest then raging. Joseph Phillips wrote to him on Dec. 21, 1821, asking him how his section stood with regard to supporting him personally. Phillips had every confidence in the ultimate success of the canvass which he was then making for Governor upon a pro-slavery ticket. In his reply some months later, Sloo frankly tells Phillips that he believes that Judge Thomas Browne will get the vote of his county and the result shows that he was correct. Judge Browne received 139

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Sloo, Sr., acted as commissioner in 1813 to determine land claims in the Kaskaskia District Cf. *Private Statutes at Large of the U. S.*, 1789-1845, p. 120. Later he served as Register of the Land Office at Shawneetown, Cf. *Official Register of the United States for 1822*, p. 49. He was still living in 1827, Cf. *Torrence Papers*, Box 4, No. 56. This information is interesting, for the previous impression, even of his descendants, was that Thomas Sloo, Jr. was left an orphan at an early age. Worth mentions in a letter of Aug. 2, 1820 "my sober and sincere and rational friend, your mother" (*Ibid.* Box 29, No. 58) and Sloo's young son, in a schoolboy letter of Mar. 5, 1825 (Box 21, No. 49), refers to both his grandparents, then in Illinois. In addition Worth refers (*Ibid.* Box 29, No. 61) to Sloo's brother Howell, who was associated with Henry L. Webb in land speculations and in selling wood to steamboats in southern Illinois; to John, of whom no other mention occurs; to James [C], who is mentioned by Snyder (*loc cit* 206), and [Albert Gallatin], who figures so prominently in the Tehuantepec project of the 40's and 50's.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the letters of Worth as given in *Torrence Papers* and also *Ibid.* Box 11, No. 62 and Box 25, No. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* Nos. 62-65.

<sup>4</sup> Snyder, *loc cit.* p. 203.

votes in Hamilton County in 1822, while Edward Coles received only 25 and Joseph Phillips 67. It was this division of pro-slavery votes between Browne and Phillips which gave the election to Coles by a plurality of 50 votes.<sup>1</sup>

In this same year, 1822, Sloo himself was elected to the Illinois Senate as a Representative of Hamilton and Jefferson counties. Shortly afterward he received this interesting letter from his friend Worth,<sup>2</sup> now located in New York City:

"It gives me much pleasure to learn that you have become an important spoke in the legislative wheel of your State. Your stump speech must have been a good one. I always thought you possessed more natural eloquence than many public speakers, yours is not of the lond, the empty or declamatory species. But of that gentle persuasive and unsophisticated character, which is calculated to be felt, and consequently to be followed. If soundness of head, integrity of principle, kindness of heart and gentleness of temper, are considered of any value, or held in any estimation in Illinois you will become a favorite of the people. I pray God you may be enabled to settle in a satisfactory manner all your old business, and stand from all pecuniary evils, redemmed, regenerated and disenthralled."

Sloo's legislative experience during the following winter may be judged from a letter he writes to his brother-in-law Torrence.<sup>3</sup> In it he says:

"We have had a very tedious and unpleasant session, there has been nothing but a continued scene of intrigue and electioneering. On the 9th inst. we had our election for Senator and Chief Justice. Our friend Jesse B. (Thomas) was re-elected on the first ballot, notwithstanding every exertion was made to defeat him. His triumph is the greater, as he had, a great portion of the big folks against him; but no matter we beat them, and I hope we shall always beat them."

The extract indicates that Sloo was strongly attached to the party of Jesse B. Thomas and that the "big folks," that is Senator Edwards and his party, were openly arraigned against him. Calhoun, then Secretary of War and still a candidate for the Presidency, had greatly opposed the re-election of Thomas<sup>4</sup> but in this he was not to realize his wish. This result contributed to the famous "A. B. Plot" of the following year which lost for Edwards the Mexican mission and his own re-election to the Senate.

More important in view of future developments is his reference to the proposed Illinois-Michigan Canal.<sup>5</sup>

"The most important bill that we now have before the Legislature is a bill making an appropriation for internal improvements, and which contemplates the location of a canal, from Lake Michigan to the Illinois River. It has passed the House of Representatives, and has been twice read in the Senate. It is now in the hands of a select committee, and I think its fate somewhat doubtful."

<sup>1</sup> *Torrence Papers*, Box 18, No. 68. Cf. also Davidson and Sturyé, History of Illinois, pp. 300-309.

<sup>2</sup> *Torrence Papers*, Box 29, No. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Box 21, No. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, Ninian W., *History of Illinois*, pp. 490, 493 and *Edwards Papers*, pp. 203, 204.

<sup>5</sup> See Note 3 *supra*.

This bill, however, ultimately passed and gave Sloo a more important position in State politics. A board of five commissioners was appointed to consider the ways and means of constructing this canal under permission granted by the Federal Government. Sloo was one of these commissioners and at its first meeting was elected president and was the moving spirit in their later report advising the construction of the canal.<sup>1</sup>

In this same letter Sloo states, in January, 1823, that the convention question which involved the issue of slavery in Illinois was very doubtful and that there would not be more than one or two votes either way. As is well known the one vote necessary in the House was later obtained by unseating a member opposed to calling the convention. Sloo's own position in regard to this question seems to be doubtful. Dr. Snyder states<sup>2</sup> that he voted for the resolution submitting the convention to the people. Letters from his friends,<sup>3</sup> however, seem to indicate that he was opposed to the introduction of slavery into Illinois, and his son assures me that he never owned slaves himself, even when he resided in Louisiana; so if he voted for submitting the convention question to the people he must have done so for some reason of political expediency and not because he favored a system even of modified slavery for the new State of Illinois.

In the course of the following summer Governor Coles offers Sloo the position of Aid-de-Camp to himself as Commander-in-Chief of the State militia. After explaining the duties of this office he adds:<sup>4</sup> "Whether you accept this situation or not, you will do me the justice, I trust, to believe that I derive a sincere pleasure in giving you this small testimony of that great respect and sincere regard which I have long cherished for you."

In his reply declining the position because of his many engagements Sloo was equally frank and his expression throws some light upon his political principles:

"Believe me, sir, it is with no small degree of regret, that I have to decline your polite and friendly offer, but I am one of those old-fashioned fellows, who think it improper, for a man to accept of an appointment, without a reasonable probability of having it in his power, to perform the duties of the station."

He goes on to explain that his work as canal commissioner and his legislative duties at Vandalia would consume so much of his time that he could not be absent from home the additional period necessary to review the militia. He closes with cordial expressions of friendship for Governor Coles and with an invitation to visit him at his home in Hamilton County.

During this same period his friend Worth kept him busy with suggestions for looking after his lands in Illinois, paying taxes upon the

<sup>1</sup> *Torrence Papers*, Box 36, No. 14 and also Davidson and Stuvé, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc cit*, 203. In a letter to the writer Dr. Snyder states that Ex-Governor John Reynolds is his authority for this statement.

<sup>3</sup> Under date of Aug. 3, 1823, Israel T. Canby writes from Madison, Indiana to Sloo, "You express your hostility to the introduction of slavery" [into Illinois] and goes on to elaborate a scheme of modified slavery for the state. *Torrence Papers*, Box 4, No. 13. Cf. also Worth's letter, *Ibid*, Box 29, No. 65.

<sup>4</sup> *Torrence Papers*, Box 21, No. 44.

same, and in other ways effecting the financial redemption of both. In the midst of the worst account of these financial worries Worth goes on to say:<sup>1</sup>

"But notwithstanding all this, I am in fact and in feeling unchanged. My memory is good, honest, and tenacious of its stores. Every benefit conferred, every act of kindness, of friendship, or of partiality is registered in a firm and durable character, and I stand ready to endorse the list. Among the many recorded I always find yours and Mrs. Sloo's standing in bold relief; around these names, the lines, obligatory of favor, of kindness and of hospitality, appear to thicken at each review. I make the confession once for all, and believe me 'tis an honest one."

He then urges Sloo to support Clay for the Presidency and closes with this prophecy:

"How comes on your Canal? and how do you stand politically. I expect to see you Governor of Illinois yet. If you were perfectly free from all your old business concerns, you would naturally rise in any walk you might choose, either in Church or State."

The early months of 1824 must certainly have been a stirring time for Mr. Sloo. His correspondence shows that he was busied with the affairs of the Canal Commission, that he was troubled by his friend Worth with many details in regard to the latter's land holdings in Illinois and his debt to the Branch Bank, that he took some part, although it does not just appear what, in the exceedingly exciting convention campaign of this same year, and that he was considerably exercised over the apparent failure of Dr. Alexander's land speculations in southern Illinois. In regard to the Presidency under the date of April 14, 1824, his friend Worth writes,<sup>2</sup> "You must be a Crawfordite, if I should judge from the office you lately held. Pray, will Illinois support that radical chief?" Worth states in regard to the situation in his own state, that Crawford who seems to "calculate" on New York "reckons without his host." He then adds:

"Some of our political leaders would indeed elevate to the Presidency the Devil himself, provided he would make them his prime ministers. Remember, all the intrigues in the union, and all the radicals and political Stock Jobbers are for Crawford. I am for Clay, Adams, or Jackson in preference. I would vote for Crawford only on one condition, and that is, that he should pay my debt to the Branch."

The reference to the federal office which Sloo held is to the position as special inspector for the Treasury Department of the land offices in Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Sloo was indeed a Crawfordite and he seems to have remained true to his chief despite the representations of his friend. Possibly it was this support of Crawford upon which he relied to give him the next political position to which he aspired. We have this aspiration chronicled in Worth's letter of June 19, 1824. He says:<sup>4</sup>

"I have before me your aspiring letter of 12 May. It seems your ambition is not likely to be satisfied with trifles. Member of the Legis-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* Box 29, No. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Box 29, No. 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Box 9, No. 48.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Box 29, No. 64.

lature, Canal Commissioner, Justice of the Peace, and Agent of the Treasury, etc., etc., are mere nothings, we must be Senator of the United States! One of the grand counterpoises to Executive Influence—the sanctioning or controlling power of Official patronage! Very well—go on."

Mr. Worth does not seem to have a very high opinion of some of Sloo's associates, who were his own as well, in certain Illinois speculations, for he continues:

"Mr. Webb too (who the Devil won't rise next!) is on the road to greatness. Well, I hope it will increase his ability to pay his notes at the Branch."

"Political honors, must I think, be cheap in Illinois, when the Law-givers, and the representatives of the Majority of the people, are composed of such materials as Webb, etc., etc."

"The Doctor it seems [i. e. Dr. Wm. Alexander] has nearly run his race. I am sorry for him but remember, every dog has his day."

Worth's opinion of Webb was not likely to have any effect upon Sloo if we may judge from a letter he received from Mr. Webb himself. The missive reads:<sup>1</sup> "Received your letter of the 4th of this month [September] a few days ago before I left home, and according to your request mentioned to the representatives of Union [County] your being a candidate for the Senate of the United States. I found that they had been apprised of it previously by some of your friends." Mr. Webb's letter also shows that in addition to their common legislative experience that he and Sloo and the latter's brother, Howell, were interested in land and timber speculations in the lower part of Illinois and that Webb advised lenient terms for some of their debtors. Accordingly Worth was not more likely to influence Sloo against a possible senatorial supporter and business associate like Webb, than he was able to influence him against Crawford, his choice for the Presidency. Webb may likewise have been a Crawfordite and Sloo must have depended upon the Crawford influence to assist him in his senatorial aspirations. By this time he may have deemed himself the most prominent Crawfordite in the State, aside from Coles, who then held the Governor's chair. Worth continues:

"On the subject of your own ambitious views, I doubt not of success. As a Senator you would certainly appear to great advantage, you have a natural dignity of deportment, and a most senatorial gravity of aspect, in short, you were made for a Senator, for one of the sages of the present age, for a conscript Father! Then, you have all the necessary requisites of wit, and worth, and words, action and utterance. You have (I am not in jest) the eloquence of truth and of nature—of form, of sentiment and of feeling—not the noisy eloquence of a demagogue—not the oratorical flourish of a declaimer. But the more winning and impressive power of mildness of judgment and gentlemanly deportment. \* \* \*

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* Box 28, No. 26.

"You will be a favorite at Washington with the honest portion of all parties. \* \* \* This is my deliberate opinion."

In the month of August Mr. Sloo receives a letter from Emanuel J. West, one of his associates on the Canal Commission, who urges immediate preparations for a trip to the north, and adds:<sup>1</sup>

"You have no doubt heard of my defeat and the defeat of the main question; we are beaten easy. I hope you will not fail to be here. We have extensive political arrangements to make."

The reference above is of course to the call for a convention. This was defeated by a popular, decisive majority which marked the redemption of Illinois from any possible relapse into slavery. Upon this result Worth thus expresses himself to Sloo:<sup>2</sup>

"The rejection of a call for a Convention, is however, indicative of some good sense, or of great good fortune; for the present period is not propitious to the tinkering of Constitutions. The introduction of Slavery into your State, though it might operate favorably to the immediate interests of a few, would be the certain index to its future degradation, or the positive bar to its future moral, physical, and political importance in the Union."

This summer was also marked by an important episode which occurred in attempting to fill the American mission to Mexico—the so-called "A. B. Plot." A controversy had arisen between Edwards and Crawford over the affairs of an Illinois bank in which public funds had been deposited. Edwards made certain charges against Crawford which he was unable to substantiate. When the details of this transaction became known it led to his forced resignation of the appointment as minister to Mexico, and elicited the following comment from Worth:<sup>3</sup>

"As for Governor Edwards, he is politically damn'd in the estimation of nineteen-twentieths of the people of the United States. His charges, however true, were from their nature incapable of that clear and absolute demonstration as to fact, and that irresistible inference as to motive, which could alone sanction their introduction against so high an officer of the Government, and on such a fallacious preface. The result was such as any sensible man would have anticipated. They advanced the interests, if not the reputation of his adversary, and covered himself with obloquy and disgrace. As the conduct of the representative honours or dishonours his Constituents, the State I should suppose would 'feel the stain like a wound' and punish its author with merited contempt. If therefore you have no more formidable rival for the Senate than Edwards, I predict your success. In truth I know of no weight of character, of talent or merit, which should induce you to withdraw, or to despair of your election."

In December Edwards did appear as a candidate for re-election to the Senate, but he had lost his hold upon the electorate of Illinois and the prize passed to another. It was John McLean, however, who filled

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* Box 28, No. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Box 29, No. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Box 29, No. 65. Benton in his *Thirty Years View*, I., pp. 34-36 is unfavorable to Edwards. An opposite view is expressed in Edwards, *History of Illinois*, pp. 135-154 and the *Edwards Papers*, pp. 223-231, and by Ford, *History of Illinois*, pp. 62-64.

out Edward's unexpired term and who wished to succeed also to the six year period following. In this, he too, was doomed to disappointment, for in the week following his election to the temporary place, the Illinois Legislature selected Elias Kent Kane for full-term Senator. McLean and Sloo as well as other aspirants, among whom we may mention John Reynolds, failed to achieve their ambition, but Mr. Sloo received the complimentary number of four votes when Kane was elected.<sup>1</sup> At about this time his friend sent the following from New York:<sup>2</sup>

"How comes on your Senatorial race? I pray God you may succeed. I think you will. You were made for a *Senator*—cut out originally for one of the *Conscript Fathers* of this deliberative realm. \* \* \*

As soon as I hear of your success, I shall drop my familiarity and commence my future epistles with 'Most potent, grave, and reverend Seignor.'

That there are compensations even when one wholly misses his senatorial aspiration, seems to be shown in an interesting letter which John McLean writes to Sloo from Washington, Jan. 16, 1825.<sup>3</sup> He expresses his mortification at being left out for the long term and believes that he has been betrayed by those who pretend to be his friends—men who wish to use him by stating that he was reserved to seal the triumph of the party by beating Cook for Congress. As McLean says, "This kind of soft corn may do to feed children but it is too lite diet for men." McLean does not propose to desert the party but he intends to expel some men from camp. He seems to feel especially bad over his defeat because he fears that this check would cloud his future prospects. He may have felt his reverse more keenly because of the fact that Niles Register<sup>4</sup> stated that he had been elected for a full term as well as the unexpired one. His letter is important not only from the personal point of view but because it shows the existence of an embryo party organization to which he and Sloo belonged. McLean makes mention of this in a succeeding letter of Jan. 22, 1825,<sup>5</sup> in which he expresses himself as pleased that his name had not been used for a vacancy in the State Supreme Court:

"I have no faith in the men who call themselves the party. I mean collectively. Old Nic or the Devil could not be more hypocritical or false or selfish than some of them."

In 1825 the Illinois Canal project was beginning to attract notice outside the State and Sloo received a number of inquiries with regard to the project of connecting Lake Michigan with the Mississippi, and in regard to steamboat navigation on the Illinois River. One of these inquiries is penned by James Geddes of New York who two years before had been considered for the post of engineer of the Canal Commission.<sup>6</sup> One of the later correspondents in mentioning his canal project and personal finances, expresses the belief that in a few years Sloo and his

<sup>1</sup> Snyder loc. cit. p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> Torrence Papers, Box 29, No. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Box 17, No. 3. See also Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. XXVII, p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> Torrence Papers, Box 17, No. 4. See Appendix B.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Box 9, No. 33.

friends will be coming from the west in steam carriages on railways "at the rate of ten to fourteen miles per hour."<sup>1</sup>

By this time Sloo's prominence in the State seemed to assure him of greater future consideration at the hands of its voters. Casual references in his correspondence show that from his arrival in Illinois he had opposed the faction under the leadership of Edwards. That political chief was anxious to recover his political prestige which had suffered so greatly in his controversy with Crawford. In connection with this a quotation from a letter which Edwards writes to John McLean of Ohio, then Postmaster-General, is of considerable interest. Edwards states that he does not expect to enter politics again but if he does, no power of politicians at home or in the Union can keep him from the Governorship. He would enter upon his contest, however, only to help Calhoun whom he loves and whose friends, he hopes, will do nothing to endanger his chances.<sup>2</sup> This determination on the part of Edwards is of considerable interest to us for by this time the opposition faction had determined to run Mr. Sloo as its candidate for Governor. We are left in doubt as to the various motives which influenced this choice. We may surmise, however, that the men who supported Sloo represented a combination of former Crawfordites like Coles and some pro-slavery men. Jesse B. Thomas, whom Sloo had earlier claimed as his friend and whom he had assisted in his second election to the United States Senate, did not support him. He, however, secured a considerable element representing those who later formed the Jacksonian party in Illinois and most of [the] latter group who did not vote for him seemed afterwards to regret the fact.<sup>3</sup>

Of course Sloo suffered from inexperience in conducting a campaign against such a veteran as Edwards. He had resided less than six years in the territory but in respect to brief residence he does not suffer in comparison with many of his contemporaries or with such later politicians as Douglas. He was a man of extremely simple life and tastes, but was not on the plane of Lincoln. He had important family connections in Ohio and influential friends throughout the whole northwest. His old friend, William Henry Harrison, was just being elected to the United States Senate from Ohio and his former employer and benefactor, Findlay, had just been sent to Congress from the first Ohio district. As the representative of this group in Illinois, with the Crawford interest back of him and with business connections in all parts of the State, and associated with so important an economic interest as the canal, he might reasonably aspire to the highest office within the gift of the people of Illinois. His opponent, Edwards, was greatly handicapped by his controversy with Crawford; while Sloo's handicap seems to have been the record of his financial failure in Cincinnati, which was the chief point of attack urged by his opponent. The result of the election in which Edwards won by a small majority, is really a tribute to Sloo and by no means an entire victory for Edwards, who was hampered in his plans by a hostile Legislature.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Box 3, No. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *McLean Papers*, MSS., Library of Congress.

<sup>3</sup> *Torrence Papers*, Box 19, No. 22. See also the following quotation from McRobert's letter.

Edwards came into office on what in modern days we should call an anti-graft campaign, although his friend John McLean, the Postmaster General, thus expresses himself:<sup>1</sup>

"For your success in the late election (although your competitor was an old and I believe a sincere friend of mine) I feel a deep interest. It has often been referred to by me as triumphant refutation of the scandals which had been so extensively circulated against you."

Edwards now proceeded to bring all sorts of charges of financial irregularity against his opponents. The net result of the various investigations which the Governor set on foot was absolutely nothing. In view of the confusion arising through Edward's course, the following quotation from a letter of Samuel McRoberts to Sloo is of considerable interest.<sup>2</sup>

"The Session since I have been here, has been a boisterous one. Many circumstances with which you are no doubt acquainted, tended to produce a spirit of discord.

We have been expecting to see you here. And I am well assured had it fell to your lot to have presided over the State, and many here who opposed your election now regret the course they pursued and that you had not been elected, the ill feelings and angry passions produced here this winter, would never have been heard of. It is a misfortune to Illinois that you were not elected. It is in truth a deep misfortune, both as it respects the internal harmony and prosperity of the State and her character abroad.

I was in Kentucky in the fall. Many gentlemen there expressed the warmest feelings for you, and hoped the Legislature would recognize you as Governor. It was understood there that there was likely to be a contest before the General Assembly upon the subject."

McRoberts was not the only one to voice the feeling of regret at the election of Edwards. Ex-Governor Coles wrote from Washington advising Sloo to be careful of the political course that he and the former Crawfordites took at this time.<sup>3</sup> James Hall, one of the victims of Edward's judge-breaking law, expressed himself more forcefully.<sup>4</sup> In a second long letter describing political conditions in the State which affords an interesting comparison with those published in the *Edwards Papers*, Hall describes the various combinations which resulted in placing Illinois in the Jackson column. He was not much of a political prophet if we may judge from the fact that he advised Sloo that Jackson's day was over in Illinois, because of the canal appropriation which Cook had secured from Congress.

More interesting than these expressions of regret was the proposal made by Elijah C. Berry that Sloo might technically claim that he still exercised the office of Quartermaster General of the State militia and refuse to honor Edward's requisitions for certain arms belonging to the State.<sup>5</sup> As the request from Edwards followed certain Indian difficulties which then afflicted the northern part of the State, this attempt to gain partisan advantage by hampering the Governor does not

<sup>1</sup> Edwards, *History of Illinois*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> See Note 3, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Torrance Papers*, Box 4, No. 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Torrance Papers*, Box II, Nos. 4, 5. See Appendix C and D.

<sup>5</sup> *Torrance Papers*, Box 2, No. 26.

suggest patriotism of a high order. We are pleased to note that Sloo definitely and promptly rejected it. He writes:

"Situated as I am in relation to the present commander in chief [i. e. Governor Edwards] had I barely doubts as to the termination of my appointment delicacy would forbid my imposing any obstacle to interrupt the harmonious administration of his government. Believing as I do, that there is at present, no Quartermaster General of the State the arms would of course be under the entire control and disposition of the Governor."

With this quotation we may fittingly end the career of Mr. Sloo in Illinois. Within a few months he had closed his affairs in that State and transferred his family to New Orleans where he began once more his career as a merchant and where a large measure of success and honor came to him during his succeeding life of nearly half a century. We must not regard his leaving Illinois as in any sense a desertion of the field of combat in the hour of political defeat. His correspondence shows that his prospects for future success in the political arena were good and the success obtained by his friends indicates that he might have anticipated a like measure of political honors. But the financial burdens resting upon him since his failure in Cincinnati were not wholly liquidated and his public duties undoubtedly prevented him from giving the attention to the development of his private affairs that was necessary to accomplish this purpose.<sup>1</sup> His field of operation in southern Illinois was too limited for him and with his business and political associates, his previous reputation for probity and good fellowship, he might reasonably aspire to a larger measure of success in New Orleans, the commercial emporium of the West. His course does not suffer in comparison with other political leaders in Illinois. Joseph Phillips had gone to Tennessee after his defeat for the Governorship in 1822. Jesse B. Thomas retired to Ohio when he completed his term of service in the United States Senate, and even Ninian Edwards planned at one time to take up his residence in Texas.

I have called Mr. Sloo a typical politician of Illinois. He came to the State, as did many others, representing certain political influences that were making themselves felt in the nation at large. He was young and ambitious. He immediately entered public life and aspired to the highest situations to be attained therein. He gained a measure of success, followed the personal bent of politics of his period, and eventually moved on to another and far different scene of action. In all of these respects he is typical of the various groups of politicians that played their part in the first decade of Illinois State history. And he has left an impression which, though slight, is worthy of careful commemoration. It is in the multitude of such impressions that we read the early history of the State and its part in that political movement which we distinguish by the term "Jacksonian Democracy."<sup>2</sup>

University of Cincinnati, June 15, 1911.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Torrence Papers*, Box 3, No. 13; Box 5, No. 46; Box 12, No. 5; Box 27, No. 14.

<sup>2</sup> In the preparation of this paper the writer is under special obligations to Miss L. Belle Hamlin, Librarian of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio; to Mrs. Jessie Palmer Weber, Secretary of the Illinois State Historical Society; and to Mr. Thomas Sloo, of New Orleans, and Dr. J. F. Snyder, of Virginia, Illinois.





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